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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: RSO MEETING WITH NEW COMANDANTE OF POLICE

Classified By: Philippe Furstenberg, RSO
Reason 1.4 (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: On September 11, RSO met with the new Comandante of the Paraguayan National Police (PNP), Federico Acuna Araujo. Araujo reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the US Embassy's security needs and thanked the RSO for the large number of training opportunities the Embassy provides the PNP. In a frank conversation, however, the new Comandante seemed cautious about fighting police corruption, describing more obstacles than opportunities. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) RSO requested a courtesy call based on the August 16 nomination of Acuna as the new Comandante of Police. Although Acuna's seniority did not warrant the nomination, his selection was generally seen as a sign of commitment on the part of the Lugo government to nominate a serious official whose background was as clean as can be found in a career PNP official.

13. (S) Acuna began the conversation by saying that the major problem facing the PNP is the recent increase in crime and the associated security concerns among many Paraguayans. Asked to theorize on the reason for the recent uptick, the Comandante quickly claimed that inflation and the associated decrease in real purchase power is the source of the increase in crime. The Comandante said that over 40 percent of Paraguayans live on less than 300,000 Guaranis per month (approximately \$75). He added that over the past year, the price of meat has increased over 80 percent from about 12,000 Guarani to 20,000 Guarani per kilo. The price of milk increased from 3,800 Guaranis to over 5,000 Guaranis per liter. Comandante Acuna said that fewer and fewer people can afford to eat and more are turning to crime as a means of feeding themselves and their families. Only half-jokingly, the Comandante referred to an evening in Asuncion as a scene from the television network "Animal Planet" where the predators come out at night.

14. (S) Segueing into Police corruption, the RSO asked what the Comandante could realistically achieve to improve the PNP. The Comandante demurred, saying that until poverty is addressed, no progress can be made. Referring to the frequent police officer call for higher salaries (starting PNP police officers earn the national minimum wage of 1.4 million Guarani per month (approximately \$350)), the Comandante said the government would never be able to increase police wages while fellow citizens are starving.

15. (S) Acuna lamented the loss of the small Paraguayan farmer and the urban migration to the every-growing shanty towns along the river. Accusing Brazilian landowners of duping small Paraguayan farmers into leasing their land for a pittance, Acuna said that they leave a lifestyle of plentiful food for one of lack of employment and starvation.

16. (S) When asked about his priorities within the PNP, Acuna pulled out a copy of a strategic plan dated May, 2008 in which he proudly called for the creation of a type of

community policing that would break greater Asuncion into walkable sectors monitored by foot patrols, motorbikes and automobile support. He also spoke of dividing the current police precincts into "preventive" and "investigative" police entities. For every two "preventive" precincts, there would be one "investigative" precinct to conduct follow up and reactively support their proactive partners. RSO noted that in order for the foot patrol officers to earn the trust of the community, they would have to be upright and honest. The Comandante quickly responded that unless the officers were paid more, it would be unrealistic to expect them to behave differently than they currently do (--using observed and invented violations to solicit bribes).

¶7. (S) Acuna closed by commenting that his reorganization would not occur until the PNP received more cars with GPS capabilities and more communication equipment. Noting that such an operation would cost a lot to maintain, Acuna seemed to imply that such a reorganization is not imminent.

¶8. (S) COMMENT: Although the new Interior Minister speaks publicly of his commitment to strengthen the Paraguayan National Police and to fight police corruption, Comandante Acuna seemed resigned to more of the same. Ready to defend Police corruption as inevitable and to lay the blame anywhere but at the feet of his officers, Acuna offered little more than a proposed paper shuffle as his most ambitious proposal. Combining Acuna's statement that the PNP will not improve absent an increase in salary with his acknowledgement that no salary increase is politically feasible could lead to a dreary conclusion in the near term. Comandante Acuna may be talking above of his pay grade, however, when discussing what is politically feasible. Nonetheless, given how central police reform can be in terms of controlling corruption, the RSO office and the Embassy will seek to engage Acuna - through ATA, ILEA and Phase II of the MCC Threshold Program - in an attempt to assist the PNP and strengthen one of Paraguay's weakest institution. END COMMENT

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